



# Coping with Difficult Behaviors

Difficult behaviors in others can be stressful to interact with. Here are a few tips to help you cope effectively with some behavior types.



## The “Tank”

**Characteristics** – hostile/aggressive, puts others down, victimizes others through anger & intimidation, tries to break others down

**Coping Strategies** – stand up to them in a non-combative or non-threatening way, don’t argue with them, don’t allow interruptions, calmly state the facts, maintain your composure, get to problem-solving



## The “Super-Agreeable”

**Characteristics** – charming and likeable, makes excuses for not following through, bends the truth, makes unrealistic commitments, needs to be liked

**Coping Strategies** – talk about their personal interests, ask questions to surface hidden concerns/problems, suggest possible alternatives or solutions, be alert for delaying tactics, focus on a solution



## The “Complainer”

**Characteristics** – whines and gripes negative comments, frequently uses always or never, feels powerless with no control over the situation, knows what others should do

**Coping Strategies** – don’t be defensive, listen and acknowledge – don’t argue, do not agree or apologize, ask questions, suggest possible alternatives or solutions, encourage them to act/solve their own problem



## The “Know-It-All Expert”

**Characteristics** – uses knowledge and skill to control others, strong belief in personal perceptions, rigid – not open minded, poor listener, aggressive behavior

**Coping Strategies** – be well prepared, listen and paraphrase what they say, don’t challenge but ask questions to lead them to see their errors, praise their ability, focus on the solution



## The “Staller”

**Characteristics** – will not make a decision, wants everyone to agree (needs to protect), afraid to take risks, allows events to control decision

**Coping Strategies** – help them to be honest, help them problem-solve, surface conflicts/concerns, work out a win-win possible solution, support their decision, ask for timelines



## The “Sniper”

**Characteristics** – shoots from cover (may talk to someone else), uses humor as a disguise, uses plays when confronted (“Can’t you take a joke?” or “You’re too sensitive”)

**Coping Strategies** – address the behavior openly, ask others if they agree with the criticism, confront plays such as humor, and use a response such as “I thought I heard a criticism in your comment. Did you mean it that way?”, address sniping each time it occurs until it stops.

Hints are adapted from “Coping with Difficult People” (1981) by Robert M. Bramson, Ph.D.

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